

## Book Reviews

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The purpose of this section is to acquaint readers with books of recent vintage, currently in print, and holding special interest for word lovers. All books will be reviewed from the special standpoint of recreational linguistics.)

**SISSON'S WORD AND EXPRESSION LOCATER**, by Dr. A. F. Sisson. 371 pages. Parker Publishing Company, West Nyack, New York, 1966.

Attractively bound in green and gold, this book is described as a new kind of thesaurus, more a dictionary in reverse, enabling the consultant to find a word or expression by looking up its meaning. Thus, if we need a term for someone who hates tobacco smoke, we will find the proper word (**MISOCAPNIST**) under "tobacco"; the name for the science of computing time by counting tree rings (**DENDROCHRONOLOGY**) is included under the heading of "time"; and the adjective that means "having shapely and beautiful buttocks" (**CALLIPYGIAN**) is quite logically listed under "buttocks." Similarly, if you cannot recall the Latin equivalent of "there is no accounting for tastes," you will locate it under "taste": **DE GUSTIBUS NON EST DISPUTANDUM**, along with a closely related French expression: **CHACUN A SON GOÛT**.

As thesauruses go, Sisson's work is rather small, but the vocabulary it presents is most exclusive, embracing a great deal far off the beaten path. Browsing through the book is like traveling along the borderlands of language, with every page offering words one has never before encountered. The reader's eye is continually caught by such out-of-this-world synonyms as **SOPHROSYNE** for "common sense," **LUCTIFEROUS** for "causing gloom," and **CURIOLOGICS** for "picture writing." The foreign phrases are just as abstruse, and we learn that a willing and devoted slave is an **AME DAMNÉE**; that an odd character is a **DRÔLE DE CORPS**; and that "hit or miss" as an adverb can be replaced with the more elegant **A TORT ET A TRAVERS**.

There are some who might be tempted to think of Sisson's thesaurus as a guide to making one's speech and writing totally unintelligible. We prefer to regard it as a flight into the verbal stratosphere, as a fulfillment of the purpose for which language was created: in short, as words in their glory.

Unfortunately for the true word devotee, not all of the entries reach the exalted plane of the examples cited above. If, for instance, we refer to "foe," the synonyms

that greet us there are a most undistinguished lot: ADVERSARY, ANTAGONIST, COMBATANT, COMPETITOR, and OPPONENT. It is, presumably, difficult to refrain from lapsing into the colloquial now and then.

Also on the negative side, the author's emphasis is on selectivity, not on completeness. If we want synonyms for "pregnancy," we are regaled with FECUNDITY, FETATION, GRAVIDATION, GRAVIDITY, and GESTATION. Omitted are other equivalents such as CYESIS, ENCEINTESHIP, ENCYESIA, EUCYESIS, GRAVIDISM, PARTURIENCE, SYLLEPSIS, and TECNOGONIA. At least some of these have apparently been suppressed as being too scientific or too technical for general use.

The book also suffers from a technical flaw. Even a casual examination reveals a surprising number of typographical errors. Thus, SEQUELAE is misprinted SEQUALAE; a transposition has converted ZIGGURAT into ZIGGUART; omission of a letter has transformed IPSISSIMA VERBA into IPISSIMA VERBA; and insertion of a letter has changed DUPLICITOUS into DUPLICITIOUS. Accordingly, any suspicious-looking word or phrase must be checked against an unabridged dictionary for accuracy.

Despite its weaknesses, this thesaurus is a remarkable work and merits a place in the library of recreational linguistics.

**JUMBLE—THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME**, edited by Henry Arnold and Bob Lee. 128 pages. A Signet Book published by The New American Library, New York, New York, 1967.

The JUMBLE has been a popular newspaper feature for many years. Now, for the first time, a collection of 110 JUMBLES has been published in paperback form.

A typical JUMBLE consists of four words, each one given in scrambled form. Let us assume that you face the letter combinations TUBIC, LEAFS, INFEEL, and LOWELY. Your first assignment is to rearrange each combination into a meaningful word—in this case, into CUBIT, FALSE, FELINE, and YELLOW. Next, you write the words into letter paths provided in the JUMBLE. Some of the letter spaces in these paths (at least one in each word) have been circled in the JUMBLE. You pick out the letters that fall into the circled spaces. In this hypothetical problem, let us say that those letters are the I in CUBIT, the F in FALSE, the first E in FELINE, and the first L in YELLOW. Combine them and you have IFEL. Finally, you turn to the word-and-picture clue included with the JUMBLE. This one carries the legend, "The original do-it-yourself project." Transposing the four available letters to form various possible words and names (FILE, LIFE, LEIF, etc.), you quickly establish that the word matching the clue is LIFE. You have solved the JUMBLE.

For the average word enthusiast, JUMBLES are an excellent means of sharpening one's skill in converting letter combinations into actual words, for perceiving meanings beyond the ken of the uninitiated. The longest words normally included in a JUMBLE are of the six-letter variety, although seven-letter words have at times been used. JUMBLES, accordingly, are a stepping stone on the road to mastering longer transposals, and many a JUMBLES expert has gone on to bigger

things, such as the discovery that GRACIOUSLY is a rearrangement of GLYCOSURIA, or that TERGIVERSATION is a transposal both of INTERROGATIVES and of REINVESTIGATOR.

Ocasionaly, of course, even the expert is stumped by some particularly ingenious letter array in a JUMBLE. For instance, the combination YUFEEL in one of the JUMBLES in this book frustrated us completely. Twist and turn the letters as we might, no word or name of any sort emerged. Expecting to conquer the problem in a sneaky, underhanded fashion, we arranged the letters alphabetically (EEFLUY) and looked them up in the *Follett Vest-Pocket Anagram Dictionary* by Charles A. Haertzen, which includes some 20,000 words. To our surprise, no EEFLUY! Eventually, we had to admit defeat and peeked at the solution in the back of the JUMBLE book. What had eluded us so maddeningly was the everyday word EYEFUL.

For the expert, JUMBLES pose a challenge of a different sort. The constructors have selected their words carefully, so that there is usually no possible alternative to the right word. It becomes a game, therefore, to outwit the constructors by finding alternatives. Though not easy, it is sometimes possible. To illustrate, the combination HOUTY, evidently intended to produce the word YOUTH, also yields the proper name TOUHY. Or, SELOU, a rearrangement of LOUSE, is also a transposition of OUSEL (a European thrush), of SEOUL (the capital of South Korea), and of SOULE (Richard Soule, author of a well-known synonym dictionary).

JUMBLES, consequently, are a simple and entertaining way of adding new dimensions to your thinking about language.

**THE RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**, edited by Jess Stein and Laurence Urdang. 2059 pages. Random House, Inc., New York, New York, 1966.

*The Random House Dictionary* is the most recently published major dictionary of the English language. It has much of interest to offer anyone interested in our language, and it deserves the most careful attention on the part of word lovers.

The RHD, at least in appearance, is a greatly enlarged version of *The American College Dictionary*, a medium-sized dictionary published by Random House since 1947. It is designated "The Unabridged Edition," which is true but misleading, for the dictionary contains little more than half the number of entries found in the unabridged dictionaries to which we have heretofore been accustomed—those published by Merriam and by Funk & Wagnalls, for instance. Even so, the RHD has the advantage of greater recency, and it contains much that will not be found in any other dictionary. An examination of the main section of the RHD reveals a variety of matter never before included in a general dictionary. Some examples:

- (a) Carefully entered in the RHD are numerous features of the lunar landscape, such as SINUS MEDII, a dark plain in the center of the moon's face; PIC-COLOMINI, a walled plain in the fourth quadrant; ARAGO, a crater in the first quadrant; and MARE HIEMIS, a dark area in the third quadrant.

- (b) The dictionary includes a phenomenal number of masculine and feminine first names, some of which we do not remember ever seeing elsewhere. Examples: MARYBOB, EULEE, COOKY, THEARICA.
- (c) Listed by the RHD are considerable numbers of literary and artistic works not given by other dictionaries. For instance: LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR, a prose poem by Lautréamont (1868-1890); BALL OF FAT, a short story by Guy de Maupassant (1880), RAPE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF LEUCIPPUS, a painting by Rubens (1615).
- (d) Space Age names have been entered on a selective basis. The consultant will find in the dictionary the ATLAS, TITAN, and MINUTEMAN ballistic missiles, but not the HOUND DOG, FALCON, or LACROSSE ballistic missiles. Similarly, the MERCURY and the GEMINI spacecraft are in the dictionary, but PEGASUS and SURVEYOR are not. Why only the most important terms were included is difficult to understand; it is the less common names that are more likely to be looked up by the dictionary user.

Like most other dictionaries, the RHD has its share of definitions that fail to define. For example, assume that you want to know what APPAREL as a noun means. Look the word up, and you are led into a labyrinth of synonyms from which no real definition ever emerges. APPAREL is defined as "clothing, garments, attire, raiment". So, you refer to each of the four synonyms, and discover these definitions:

CLOTHING = garments, clothes, raiment, apparel.

GARMENT = clothing.

ATTIRE = clothes, apparel, garments.

RAIMENT = clothing, apparel, attire.

The only new term introduced in these definitions is "clothes." Consulting "clothes," you find that term explained as "garments, apparel, dress." Again, one new synonym, "dress," has been inserted. Checking "dress," you learn that it is "clothing, apparel, garb, attire." Yet another synonym has been added—"garb." You consult "garb" and find that it means "apparel, clothes." The chain of eight mutually synonymous words is now closed, and you do not know what any of the words actually means. Certainly, it is possible to define these words meaningfully. One dictionary, for instance, defines CLOTHES as "covering for a person's body"; another one defines CLOTHES as "covering for the human body."

Following the main section of the RHD is a 395-page Supplement. A little more than one half of this Supplement consists of concise, two-way dictionaries covering French, Spanish, Italian, and German. These dictionaries are more ornamental than useful. Certainly, they would not be adequate for the translation of even a short paragraph written in any of the four languages. An occasional isolated word, maybe; any connected text, no. Neither do these dictionaries display consistency. Thus, the French NAUFRAGE is translated into English as "shipwreck," but the English-French section does not include SHIPWRECK at all; or, the Spanish word SAYA is translated into English as "skirt," but the English word "skirt" is translated back into Spanish as FALDA. Such inconsistencies reflect the inadequacy of extremely concise dictionaries. Anyone who needs a foreign-language dictionary is going to need a larger one than that provided by the RHD.

Another 113 pages of the Supplement are devoted to a concise world atlas. This atlas is also of marginal utility, designed more to impress than to serve, but it contains a variety of interesting features not easily found elsewhere. Innovations include:

- (a) a list of major ocean deeps;
- (b) a list of the volcanoes of the world, showing the date of the most recent eruption;
- (c) a map of the moon's surface (of the side facing the earth);
- (d) flags of 126 nations of the world, including some it is not easy to find elsewhere, such as the flags of North Korea, North Vietnam, East Germany, and Surinam.

Also welcome in the atlas section, of course, is a reasonably up-to-date map of Africa. Maps of that continent several years old are obsolete, and it can confidently be expected that the RHD map will also become obsolete in the not too distant future; for the moment, it is good.

In addition to valuable features of its content, the RHD is printed on a quality of paper, and the printed page is so designed, as to make that dictionary psychologically very appealing to consult; much more so than its competitors. Of course, these advantages do not replace some 200,000 or 250,000 dictionary entries found in other lexicons that have been omitted from the RHD.

The ideal dictionary would be one that combined the best features of all the leading dictionaries now available. We are not likely ever to see such a reference work.